



NATIVE AMERICAN MOUNDS

located on
Rushford's

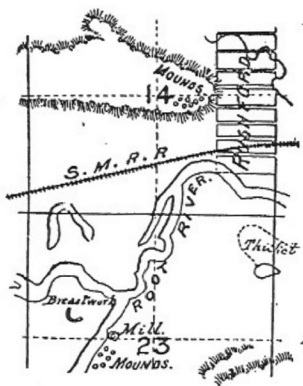
Magelssen Bluff

Rushford's Magelssen Bluff was home to six Native American mounds. Native American mounds in the Driftless region are generally massive earthen effigy mounds that are concentrated on high bluffs and ridge crests overlooking rivers. Created by various Native American tribes hundreds to thousands of years ago, these mounds are unique in all the world. Many still exist, but the Rushford mounds have been reduced to a historical narrative and an estimation of where they were located.

There were six mounds on Magelssen Bluff along the central ridge of the salient surveyed in 1884. Mound 6 was the one highest up the ridge and farthest from the edge of the cliff. Mounds 1, 2, 3 and 4 were round; mounds 5 and 6 were elongated. (see illustration)

The mounds were unusual in that they were rock burials with slabs of dolomite and limestone used as a surface covering and to cover the remains inside the mounds. (see U of M photo)

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MOUNDS AT RUSHFORD.

The six mounds of Magelssen Bluff can be seen in this illustration, located along the central ridge of the salient surveyed in 1884. Mound 6 was located highest up the ridge and farthest from the edge of the cliff. Mounds 1-4 were round and mounds 5 and 6 were elongated.



Historic Bur Oak atop Rushford's Magelssen Bluff

This massive bur oak is nearly 200 years old (2024). It was examined by the DNR many years ago and is believed to be one of the oldest oak trees in the state. (Photo courtesy of Ross Himlie Photography)



University of Minnesota 1935 photo of Rushford mound 3, 21FL0009, showing the veneer, or covering of dolomite slabs (U of M files). The mounds were unusual in that they were rock burials with slabs of dolomite and limestone used as a surface covering and to cover the remains inside the mounds. See the shovel at the far right for scale.

Unearthing the Native American mounds

By 1884, mounds 1, 2, 3 and 5 had been opened and mound 4 was destroyed. The University of Minnesota excavated the 4 round mounds from July 3-10, 1935. Looters had dug into the center of mounds, but they had not reached the burial pits. Archaeologists discovered four skeletons and two complete bowls.

The skeletons showed that dental and physical health compromised as they aged. For instance, the adolescent didn't have any tooth loss, while the two adults had lost the majority of their teeth and showed signs of arthritic degeneration.

In 1935, Archeologist Wilford believed the bowls were of Oneota origin. The Oneota lived AD 1100-1500 across southern Minnesota. However, Archeologist Wedel disputed this in 1954, identifying the pots as more akin to Middle Mississippian pottery rather than Oneota.

Communications in 1993 from the U of M's Archaeology Department indicated that human bones and associated burial material was to be returned to the ground through the "Minnesota Native American Reburial and Repatriation Project." The Native American community does not want anyone not directly related to the project to know the dates and locations of the reburial.

Findings

Mound 1: Skeleton of infant estimated to be 3 months based on dental development. The baby's ribs show signs of unhealed infection.

Mound 2: 2 individual burials within this mound. The first skeleton was a 40-50-year-old adult male that showed signs of arthritis, cysts, and healed infections. The second skeleton was also a 40-50-year-old male, about 5'7" to 5'9" tall with signs of disease, lesions, and an infection at time of death. The second skeleton had half of teeth abscessed prior to death.

Mound 3: 17 or 18-year-old 5'4" male skeleton and a complete bowl.

Mound 4: Virtually destroyed prior to 1935. They uncovered badly-charred bones which might be a sign of cremation, although that wasn't conclusive.

Mounds 5 & 6 were not excavated. It is unclear why.



Learn about plantlife on Magelssen Bluff by playing our scavenger hunt!

More on Native Americans in Rushford at www.rushfordhistory/nativeamericans

Sources: A 1993 letter from David M. Hayes, University of Minnesota Department of Anthropology; The Aborigines of Minnesota – Rushford Mounds; paper by Kathleen Blue; Minnesota's Indian Mounds and Burial Sites: A Synthesis of Prehistoric and Early Historic Archaeological Data by Constance M. Arzigian and Katherine P. Stevenson, 2003 by the Minnesota Office of the State Archaeologist; Decoding the Driftless documentary.